

## **A Christian's Righteousness** (cont.)

*Matthew 5:33-48*

In the previous study Jesus shows that a true relationship with God is linked with how we relate to other people. A person cannot shove another person aside on the way to the altar of God's presence. To despise another person as worthless is in essence to "murder" that person. Also, reducing another person to a mere sex object is a form of adultery. Thirdly, Jesus affirms the permanence of marriage as one way of honouring our marital partners.

The next three illustrations of a true righteousness are found in Matthew 5:33-48. The passage is considered by many to be the highest point of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' words are admired by some and despised by others. He calls us to tell the truth, to meet evil with good and to love our enemies. Nowhere is the challenge of the road less traveled more evident. Nowhere is the uniqueness of the Christian way more evident. Nowhere is the need for the power of the Holy Spirit (whose first fruit is love) greater.

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1. When you were a child did Mom or Dad ever make a promise to you which they did not keep? How did you feel?
2. **Read Matthew 5:33-37.** How might the use or abuse of oaths be connected with the subject of marriage & divorce?
3. It's clear from Matthew 23:16-22 that the Pharisees considered some oaths binding and some not. Why is Jesus opposed to making oaths (Matthew 5:34-37)?
4. Why should oaths be unnecessary for Jesus' followers? What should replace oaths or vows? Why?

Is it wrong for the Christian to take an oath in all situations? What about making an oath in a courtroom or making an oath of allegiance?

5. As a kid, what sort of fights did you get into? How would you describe yourself in those fights: Mike Tyson or "Chicken Little"? Why?
6. **Read Matthew 5:38-42.** Jesus' quotation, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth", comes from Exodus 21:23-25 (with parallels in Leviticus 24:19-20 and Deuteronomy 19:21). The OT law in question is the so-called "lex talionis". It was a law for the judges to employ in the context of a courtroom as is crystal clear by the wording of Exodus 21:22 & 22:8,9. It was not authorization for individuals to even the score; it gave no comfort to a private spirit of retaliation; it was not discharged by persons swept up in a personal vendetta. So how would this instruction to Israel's judges clarify the meaning of justice?

How would the "lex talionis" limit the extent of revenge?

7. The Pharisees took this principle of just retribution out of the law courts where it belonged and introduced it into personal relationships where it does not belong. They tried to use it to justify personal revenge; they asked how far may my personal retaliation extend without breaking the law? What might be the consequences of this kind of behaviour by the Pharisees?
8. Jesus seems to go beyond the law of retaliation by suggesting that we should be prepared to return good for evil: turn the other cheek, give more than is asked, go the second mile. Isn't this unrealistic & impractical? What is accomplished by turning the other cheek or going the second mile?
9. How do we reconcile Christ's call to nonretaliation with the responsibility of the state to punish the evil doer (Romans 13:1-5)? That is, is Jesus' teaching of pacifism (not passivism) intended for individuals only? Nations also? Both? Would Jesus resist a Hitler? If so, how?
10. As a kid, who was your Public Enemy #1? Why? Today, who is the toughest for you to love? Why?
11. **Read Matthew 5:43-48.** Verse 43 is an allusion to Leviticus 19:18 but it (verse 43) is a blatant perversion of the OT Scriptures because of what it adds and what it omits. What does it add, and what does it omit?
12. Notice that the object of one's love in Leviticus 19:18 is one's neighbour whereas the object of one's love in Matthew 5:44 is one's enemies. What reasons does Jesus give for loving our enemies (44-48)? Why should I be neighbourly to someone who is unneighbourly to me?
13. Our Lord concludes this portion of the Sermon on the Mount with the words: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." How can we attain perfection like His? Is it even worthwhile to try?

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**PRAYER:** "Lord, my mind has known the truths of these words for a long time, but I have forgotten them in my spirit. Rescue me, I pray, from the inadequacy of merely doing what is required, and give me the great joy of living honestly, generously, selflessly, and lovingly as you live. Through Jesus, who is perfect in mercy. Amen.